

## Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8697

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3921

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINT, LE, SY

SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON

REF: DAMASCUS 3981

1. THIS MORNING'S L'ORIENT LE JOUR DRAWS CONCLUSIONS FROM REMARKS MADE BY SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT KAMEL AL ASSAD AFTER SEEING SARKIS YESTERDAY THAT SARKIS STILL PLANS TO RESIGN AND WILL DO SO WITHIN NEXT THREE DAYS. I CALLED FONMIN BOUTROS TO ASK HIM ABOUT THIS AND HE SAID HE DID NOT THINK SUCH AN INFERENCE WAS WARRANTED AND THAT RESIGNATION SITUATION WAS "STABLE." NEVERTHELESS, IF I UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY SYRIAN ATTITUDES AND THOSE OF CHRISTIAN MILITANTS, I AM INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC THAT SARKIS IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO PUT IT ALL TOGETHER. A MORE POSITIVE AND DYNAMIC LEADER

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WOULD PERHAPS BE ABLE TO MAKE SOMETHING OF THE CURRENT SITUATION BUT SARKIS' CONTINUED TEMPORIZING AND INDECISION MAKE IT INCREASINGLY UNLIKELY THAT HE WILL FIND A WAY OUT OF THE IMPASSE. HIS RESIGNATION MAY THEREFORE BE ONLY A MATTER OF TIME.

2. WERE A TRANSITION AND ELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT NOT SO

COMPLICATED WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO CONTEMPLAYE THE DEPARTURE OF SARKIS WITH SOME EQUANIMITY, HOPING THAT HE WOULD BE REPLACED BY SOMEONE BETTER. L'ORIENT LE JOUR REPORTS AN INFLUX OF WOULD-BE CANDIDATES WHO WANT TO BE HERE WHEN THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE OCCURS. (IT IS AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NO GOOD.) SOVIET AMBASSADOR TOLD FINNISH AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS VERY RELAXED ABOUT IT ALL BECAUSE HE ASSUMED SYRIANS WOULD BE ABLE TO IMPOSE PRESIDENT TO THEIR LIKING.

3. TROUBLE WITH SUCH CALCULATIONS IS THAT VERY FEW KNOWLEDGE-ABLE LEBANESE WITH WHOM I HAVE TALKED BELIEVE IT IS GOING TO BE POSSIBLE TO HAVE AN ORDERLY TRANSITION. THE MOS COMMON EXPRESSION IS THAT SARKIS' RESIGNATION WOULD MEAN A LEAP IN THE DARK. WHILE THE SYRIANS COULD ASSURE A TRANSITION IN 1976, THEY WERE WIDELY REGARDED AS SAVIOURS AT THAT TIME. SINCE THEN THEY HAVE LOST THE CONFIDENCE OF THE MARONITE LEADERSHIP AND MANY OF THE OTHER CHRISTIANS AS WELL AND THEY ARE NOT REALLY WELL REGARDED BY THE MUSLIMS. THEY COULD CONCEIVABLY FORCE THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO MEET TO VOTE, BUT THIS WOULD BE DIFFICULT AND MIGHT BE RESISTED BY FORCE OF ARMS BY THE PHALANGE. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE PLAYERS UNDERSAND THE DYNAMICS AND REALITIES OF LEBANESE POLITICAL LIFE. THE ISRAELIS SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THEM CONSIDERABLY BETTER THAN THE SYRIANS, AND I FIND SYRIAN COMMENTS ON THE SITUATION SUCH AS THOSE BY KHADDAM REPORTED IN DAMASCUS 3981 DISTURBING BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY SAY  
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ABOUT KHADDAM'S COMPREHENSION OF THE PROBLEM. I WOULD LIKE TO COMMENT ON SOME OF THOSE IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER.

4. FIRST OF ALL IS HIS ASSUMPTION THAT THE ADF COULD HAVE CLEARED UP BASHIR GEMAYEL WITHIN HOURS. IF HE BELIEVES THIS HE DOES NOT HAVE A VERY GOOD APPRECIATION OF THE MILITARY SITUATION IN WHICH THE SYRIANS FOUND THEMSELVES. THEY TRIED TO BOMBARD KATA'IB HEADQUARTERS THE BETTER PART OF THE DAY WITHOUT CONCLUSIVE RESULTS. HAD THEY ADVANCED WITH THEIR TROOPS THEY COULD EVENTUALLY HAVE TAKEN IT, BUT ONLY AFTER A BLOODY FIGHT IN WHICH SYRIAN CASUALTIES WOULD HAVE BEEN HIGH AND IT WOULD HAVE LASTED FOR SOME TIME.

5. KHADDAM IS CORRECT IN SAYING THE PHALANGE AND THE CHAMOUNISTS DO NOT REPRESENT ALL THE CHRISTIANS. THERE IS WIDESPREAD RESENTMENT AGAINST THEIR BULLYING AND GANGSTER TACTICS AND THERE WOULD NOT BE A WET EYE IN THE HOUSE IF THE PHALANGE AND THE AHRAR WERE TO DISAPPEAR TOMORROW, WERE IT NOT THAT THEY ARE REGARDED BY MANY CHRISTIANS AS A PROTECTION AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS. HAD THE SYRIANS ATTACKED ONLY THE CHAMOUNISTS AND KATA'IB HEADQUARTERS AND CONCENTRATED THEIR FIRE ON MILITIA ELEMENTS, THEY WOULD HAVE ENJOYED

CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT. IT IS THE INDISCRIMINATE AND PROLONGED  
NATURE OF THE BOMBARDMENT WHICH HAS ALIENATED A LARGE PART OF  
THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION. EVEN THE OPPONENTS OF THE PHALANGE

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EXDIS

AND KATA'IB ARE ANGRY WITH THE SYRIANS FOR BOMBARDING INDIS-  
CRIMINATELY. BEFORE THE BOMBARDMENT EIGHTY PER CENT OF THE  
CHRISTIANS MIGHT HAVE BEEN AGAINST THE PHALANGE AND THE  
CHAMOUNISTS, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN THEY WERE FOR THE SYRIANS,  
AND PRO-SYRIAN SYMPATHIES HAVE BEEN MUCH ERODED BY THE  
MASSACRE OF CHRISTIANS IN THE BEKAA AND THE BOMBARDMENT OF  
BEIRUT. ACCORDING TO DANY CHAMOUN, EVEN THE FRANGIEHS ARE  
SECRETLY ON THEIR SIDE AFTER THE BOMBARDMENT.

6. KHADDAM'S STATEMENT THAT FRANGIEH IS THE FOREMOST MARONITE  
LEADER IN LEBANON IS A SERIOUS MISCALCULATION. FRANGIEH IS  
A MURDERER AND A GANGSTER AND THERE IS NO LOVE LOST FOR HIM  
OUTSIDE ZGHORTA AND EHDEN. HE IS RESENTED FULLY AS MUCH AS  
THE GEMAYELS AND CHAMOUNS.

7. I FULLY SHARE KHADDAM'S COMPLAINT THAT SARKIS WILL NOT  
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TAKE DECISIVE ACTION AND THAT EXTRAORDINARY SITUATIONS REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY DECISIONS. SYRIANS SHOULD REALIZE, HOWEVER, THAT MUCH OF THE RESPONSIBILITY LIES WITH THEIR UNWILLINGNESS OR INABILITY TO PROCEED WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF RIYADH AND CAIRO DECISIONS REGARDING DISARMAMENT OF THE FACTIONS INCLUDING THE PALESTINIANS. THIS ESSENTIAL TASKS CAN BE DONE ONLY BY THE SYRIANS AND THEIR FAILURE TO CARRY THROUGH WITH IT HAS BROUGHT US TO OUR PRESENT PASS.

8. BOMBARDMENT OF MOSLEMS AT HAYY AS-SABIL REFERRED TO BY KHADDAM OCCURRED IN SPRING OF 1977 WHEN SYRIANS SET ABOUT TRYING TO DISLODGE "ISAM AL-ARAB AND HIS GANG FROM TARIQ AL-JADIDA. EFFORT WAS INCONCLUSIVE AND SYRIANS WERE UNABLE TO GET AT AL-ARAB BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT EQUIPPED FOR STREET FIGHTING. JOB WAS FINALLY DONE BY FATAH, NOT BY SYRIANS. THAT SARKIS ORDERED THEM TO TAKE SUCH AN ACTION SOUNDS OUT OF CHARACTER BUT PERHAPS IT OCCURRED. IN ANY EVENT, THAT WAS LIMITED ENGAGEMENT WHICH LASTED FOR ONE AFTERNOON. SYRIANS WERE SHOOTING AT SPECIFIED TARGETS AND WERE NOT RAINING DOWN MASSIVE BOMBARDMENT INDISCRIMINATELY. SAME THING CAN BE SAID ABOUT SYRIAN OCCUPATION OF SOFAR, BHAMDOUN ETC. THEY WERE FIGHTING AGAINST ARMED ELEMENTS, NOT BOMBARDING THE CIVILIAN POPULATION.

9. IN THIS REGARD DISTINCTION SHOULD ALSO BE DRAWN BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE. THE FORMER ARE CONSIDERED AS GUESTS OR INTRUDERS, DEPENDING ON ONE'S INTERLOCUTOR, BUT IN ANY EVENT THEY ARE NOT DEFENDING THEIR OWN COUNTRY, RATHER THEY ARE DEFENDING SOMEONE ELSE'S BACK YARD THEY ARE SQUATTING IN.

10. I AGREE WITH KHADDAM THAT PROBLEM SHOULD NOT BE DESCRIBED AS A CHRISTIAN OR MOSLEM PROBLEM, ALTHOUGH RELIGIOUS

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ANIMOSITIES ARE MOUNTING AND IT IS ON THAT BASIS THAT THE LINES WILL BE DRAWN. IF SYRIANS HAVE TOLD SARKIS THEY ARE READY TO COLLECT ARMS FROM ALL MILITIAS, CHRISTIAN, MOSLEM AND PALESTINIAN, THAT IS AN IMPORTANT AND FAVORABLE DEVELOPMENT. I AM SURPRISED IF THAT IS THE CASE THAT BOUTROS AND SARKIS HAVE NOT MENTIONED THIS TO ME AND WONDER WHETHER THIS COMMITMENT WAS IN FACT MADE AND WHAT CONDITIONS WERE ATTACHED TO IT.

11. WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST TO DISABUSE MILITIA LEADERS OF

EXPECTATIONS OF U.S. SUPPORT. ON OTHER HAND, IF WE ARE TO HAVE ANY INFLUENCE WITH THEM WE HAVE TO KEEP OUR LINES OPEN AND THIS INHIBITS OUR ABILITY TO TELL THEM PRECISELY WHAT WE THINK. (CHAMOUN IS FURIOUS BECAUSE I TOLD HIS MISTRESS THAT THE AHRAR WERE A BUNCH OF THUGS.) IT IS WIDELY KNOWN IN LEBANON THAT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO I SPOKE VERY FRANKLY WITH BOTH THE CHAMOUNS AND GEMAYELS AND TOLD THEM THAT THEY MUST COOPERATE WITH THE SYRIANS. THIS PERHPAS HAS HAD SOME EFFECT, BUT THE OTHER DAY CHAMOUN UPBRAIDED ME FOR HAVING URGED SUCH COOPERATION ON THEM AND SAID RESULT WAS SYRIAN BOMBARDMENT OF BEIRUT.

12. COMMENT. I SHARE BELIEF EXPRESSED IN LAST PARAGRAPH DAMASCUS 3981 THAT WE ARE IN THE EYE OF THE STORM BUT NEVER-THELESS HOPE REASON AND COOLER HEADS WILL PREVAIL, ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE INFORMATION COMING INTO US THROUGH VARIOUS CHANNELS INDICATES TO US THAT UNREASON WILL TRIUMPH. I FEEL VERY MUCH LIKE THE CHINAMAN IN THE NURSERY RHYME TRYING TO MAKE A DOLLAR OUT OF FIFTEEN CENTS. PARKER

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